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REORGANIZATION--A CONTINUING PROBLEM.

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AN ARTICLE ON SCHOOL DISTRICT REORGANIZATION IS PRESENTED TO PROVIDE HELP TO THOSE CONSIDERING THIS STEP AND TO SERVE AS A BASIS FOR RESEARCH. CHARACTERISTICS OF INADEQUATE DISTRICTS ARE LISTED, AND REASONS FOR CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF SUCH DISTRICTS ARE DISCUSSED. FIVE CRITERIA FOR MEASURING SCHOOL DISTRICT ADEQUACY ARE PRESENTED--SCOPE OF THE PROGRAM, ADMINISTRATION AND SCHOOL STAFF, STUDENT POPULATION, THE COMMUNITY, AND THE DISTRICT'S ECONOMIC BASE. MAJOR AREAS DISCUSSED FOR APPLICATION OF CRITERIA INCLUDE EDUCATION FROM KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE 12, BOARD OF EDUCATION FUNCTIONS, SCHOOL PERSONNEL REQUIREMENTS, PUPIL-TEACHER AND PUPIL-COUNSELOR RATIOS, SCHOOL DISTRICT-COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS, AND MINIMUM EXPENDITURES FOR EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS. IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH INCLUDE TWO QUESTIONS--(1) DOES MAKING THE BOUNDARIES OF A SCHOOL DISTRICT COTERMINOUS WITH A NATURAL COMMUNITY LEAD TO MORE ADEQUATE SCHOOL PROGRAMS, AND (2) WHAT ARE SOME USEFUL MEASURES OF EDUCATIONAL POTENTIAL OF A SCHOOL DISTRICT. THE ARTICLE DOES NOT INCLUDE LARGE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN ITS DISCUSSION. THIS ARTICLE WAS PUBLISHED IN THE "ADMINISTRATOR'S NOTEBOOK," VOLUME 9, NUMBER 2, OCTOBER 1960 AND IS ALSO AVAILABLE FROM THE MIDWEST ADMINISTRATION CENTER, 5835 KIMBARK AVENUE, CHICAGO 37, ILLINOIS, FOR $0.25. (RB)

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Reorganization: A Continuing Problem

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The local school district continues to be the backbone of education in America. Therefore citizens and educators are more interested in strengthening and preserving the local school district than they are in destroying this unit or transferring many of its decision-making functions and responsibilities to some other government body.

In our efforts to improve local school district organization, we have sought to rearrange boundary lines in order to construct more efficient and effective local units. With deliberate caution, state governments are providing the impetus for needed school district reorganization either through financial incentives or by legislation which makes reorganization mandatory. The substantial reduction in the total number of school districts in the United States is testimony to the progress that has been made thus far.

Despite these gains however, there are many factors which stand in the way of more rapid movement toward improved local structure. Anyone who reflects on the current educational scene can see that all children are not being given equal opportunity to obtain a good education and a large part of the blame for this condition must rest with those school districts which are unable to provide satisfactory educational opportunity.

The AASA Commission on School District Reorganization states that inadequate school districts may be characterized by any or all of the following limitations:

1. Barren, meager, insipid curriculums, particularly at the secondary-school level
2. Inability to attract and to hold high-quality teachers and administrators
3. Inability to construct the school plants needed
4. Needless waste of manpower through unjustifiably small classes and low pupil-teacher ratio
5. Unreasonably high per-pupil expenditures for the quality of educational programs provided
6. Inefficient use of financial and other educational resources
7. Poor location of buildings
8. Inequality of the burden of school support
9. Cumbersome, complex formulas for distributing state school aid
10. Absence of many needed specialized educational services that add quality to the educational program[1]

Why do these outdated school districts remain? Some would attribute their continuance to the persistence of the American principle of home rule. Many smaller communities have been formed by a cluster of people desiring certain kinds of cultural homogeneity, expressed either through religious, ethnic, or political viewpoints. The school, because it reflects the culture in which it exists, is seen often as an important agency by which this culture is maintained and perpetuated. Any attempt to alter the school district represents a threat to homogeneity and hence to the equilibrium of the community.

Another reason for the continued existence of inadequate school districts is that many people simply do not realize that the quality of the educational program in their district is inferior. This may be attributed to public apathy or

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ignorance, but more probably it is due to the fact that people have no measure of adequacy against which they might assess the educational provisions of their district. It seems that our educational leaders have been either unwilling or unable to agree upon criteria for measuring school district adequacy and, consequently, the question of what kind of school district will assure all children a satisfactory education remains unanswered.

This article presents five areas appropriate to the consideration of school district adequacy and describes the implications these have for school district organization. No reference will be made to the large city districts where the necessity to decentralize makes them somewhat unique.

Measures of School District Adequacy

Scope of Program

A school district should provide instruction from kindergarten through at least grade twelve, to insure an articulated program. The minimal program for the elementary grades should meet the standards described by most state departments of public instruction. Unless special vocational high schools are already established, a comprehensive high school program should be provided. The comprehensive high school program should, as Conant suggests:

> ...have three main objectives: first, to provide a general education for all the future citizens; second, to provide good elective programs for those who wish to use their acquired skills immediately on graduation; and third, to provide satisfactory programs for those whose vocations will depend on their subsequent education in a college or university.... This high school should have no less than 100 students in its graduating class.[2]

Complete educational services should be offered, including special classes at all age levels for the physically and mentally handicapped; health, guidance and counseling services; remedial programs for the under-achievers in any subject matter area, and special programs for the academically gifted children. Adult education ought to be offered and, where necessary, the district should sponsor, or share in sponsoring, a junior or community college.

Administration and School Staff

The board of education, which holds ultimate responsibility for the educational opportunities provided in the school district, should be composed of capable people who to a large degree are representative of the people in the district. Two major functions of this board are: 1) to crystallize community expectations for education into policies which will intelligently govern the operations of the school district, and 2) to assess the functioning of the superintendent. The board should employ a competent superintendent who will serve as professional advisor to the board as well as be the administrative head of the district.

Each attendance unit should have a full-time principal with responsibility for working with the staff of the school to insure that instruction is as good as available resources will permit. The assistance of highly competent supervisory or resource personnel should be made available to the principal to assist in the development of the instructional program. The principal should also work with his teachers to develop and enrich their professional competencies. To be an effective instructional leader for the school staff, a principal should not be expected to supervise more than 25 teachers without additional administrative assistance.

A Bachelor's degree should be the minimum requirement for certification; only certificated teachers should be employed. Teachers' salaries should include a starting wage comparable to the average starting pay for college graduates in the geographic region in which the district is located. A teacher should be able to double his starting salary within ten years, and this figure need not be the maximum wage paid in the district. Through written personnel policies, teachers should be made aware of job rights and responsibilities, probationary status, tenure, dismissal procedures, and the like. It is presumed that such a district would be able to attract and hold competent administrators and teachers.

Student Population

How many pupils within a school district are necessary in order to provide a good program and maintain a competent teaching and administrative staff? The answer to this question has been a "bone of contention" since Dawson recommended in 1934 that the minimum number of pupils needed in an administrative unit

was 9,800.[3] Most authorities today tend to agree with Conant, who suggests that an adequate elementary and secondary school program can be effectively provided, exclusive of special education services or a junior college, when the graduating class of the high school has no fewer than 100 students. Depending on the holding power of the district, this would mean an administrative unit of about 2,000 pupils. If, as Beem says, an enrollment of at least 11,000 students is required to insure a complete educational program including special services,[4] then districts with only 2,000 pupils may have to rely upon special services provided through other sources such as an intermediate district serving an area large enough to include approximately 11,000 students.

In the 1958 report of the AASA Comission on School District Reorganization, suggestions were offered with regard to the number of special education people a school district would need when it employed certain numbers of teachers.[5]

If a pupil-teacher ratio of 25:1 were applied to those figures, it is evident that an administrative unit of 10,000 to 12,500 pupils would be necessary to provide independently for the services of a psychologist, consultants in reading and language arts, and a specialist in instructional materials. If the pupil-teacher ratio were 30:1, then an administrative unit of 12,000 to 15,000 pupils would be necessary to provide these services. The same figures would also apply as the minimum number of pupils necessary to support a junior college, provided that at least one-third of the high school graduates in the district attended this institution.

In the area of guidance and counseling, guidance specialists suggest that a pupil-counselor ratio of 250:1 should be the optimum number for the secondary school, and a ratio of 600:1 the optimum number for the elementary school.[6]

The Community

For many years our literature on school organization has contained statements such as the following:

> It is important that school districts be built around communities which have concerns for education and common interests which give them identity. This is so that enthusiasm for schools by the lay citizens may be developed and that schools may make the needed adaptations to meet the needs of a community. School districts should not needlessly divide natural communities.[7]

This has been, and remains, a much used concept. The term "community," however, has many meanings. Some view a community as the area in which one shops, buys or sells, attends church, belongs to fraternal organizations, social groups, service clubs, or chambers of commerce, and enjoys recreational activities. This is the locus for which the citizen feels a general loyalty and affinity. Others define a community as a geographic area where the socio-economic differences between the residents are not too great. Still others regard a community as the place where groups of people share the same local municipal government which provides services such as fire and police protection, libraries, water and sewers, and the like.

The principal justification for seeking to organize school districts around so-called natural communities has been to maximize feelings of loyalty or pride in schools, but we have little evidence that schools with loyal patrons are, in fact, better schools. Nor do we have evidence that many school systems that include all or parts of many "natural" communities are necessarily poor schools. This is an assumption which has not been tested.

The Economic Base

If a school district requires at least 10,000 to 15,000 students, and provides for the total range of student needs, it must be financially able to support such a program.

The educational program offered in a school district appears to be related to the economic potential of the district as well as the willingness of the citizens to allocate financial resources to the support of its schools. The actual allocation of funds can be described as the existing "effort" or the current "performance" of the district.

The Educational Policies Commission has introduced one tenet for measuring performance:

> In a school district of adequate size, the minimum annual per-pupil current expenditure needed today to provide a good educational program is about twelve per cent of the salary necessary to employ a qualified beginning teacher in the district.[8]

Assuming that the average starting salary for a qualified teacher is $4,500,

a district would have to spend $540 per-pupil for current expenditures in order to meet this performance standard.

A district's potential consists of its ability (actual and prospective) and of its willingness (actual and prospective) to support an adequate educational program. Potential is more difficult to measure because of the necessity for dealing in probabilities. The potential for supporting education is contingent, among other things, upon the ratio of local funds to state and federal funds available; the rate of growth of taxable property valuation; the support necessary to carry existing capital expenditures; the rate of population and school enrollment growth; the socio-economic stratification of the people who migrate into the district; and the provisions for planning land use that prevail.

At present it is more difficult to develop criteria relevant to potential than it is to develop criteria for measuring current performance.

Implications

The threat of Communist competition has caused many Americans to question whether our schools are providing the environment which will permit all students to develop their potential. This criticism of the existing situation is forcing educational administrators to provide defensible measures of school district adequacy. Although the tenets cited in this article are not as rigorous as we would like them to be, they have been drawn from empirical studies and thoughtful recommendations of leaders in American education.

A cursory look at the contemporary scene shows that even though there have been concerted efforts to reorganize school districts, many of the available criteria are still not being met. In the area of pupil population, for example, it was said that a school district should have at least 10,000 students to be self-sufficient. Yet, in 1956 there were 30,000 districts that enrolled fewer than 50 pupils. This appears to be an impossible situation, because a change from 50 to 10,000 students in a school district is not within most citizens' zones of tolerance for change.

There is another alternative. Conant's recommendation implies that a district with 2,000 children can be adequate if it obtains certain special services from other sources, such as an intermediate district. It is our opinion that people now living in very small districts would be willing to change to a 2,000 pupil district if they were convinced such a change would actually improve educational opportunity for their children. Furthermore, we feel that some of the other standards of adequacy stated above could be reached through various alternatives if educators would just agree on the goals for adequacy and give some thoughtful planning to other possible ways to reach them.

For the researcher there are questions in this field which need further study. Does making the boundaries of a school district coterminous with a natural community lead to more adequate school programs? What are some useful measures of the educational potential of a school district?

It must be pointed out that the instructional program or curriculum, the most important test of adequacy, has not been considered explicitly. There are at least two reasons for this. First, the subject is too broad for the space limitations of a single *Notebook* article. Second, there is even less agreement about adequacy in curriculum than there is in the five areas listed above.

The ideas expressed here represent no panacea. Rather, it is our hope that they will provide some help to people considering reorganization and serve as the basis for further thoughtful inquiry into the problem.

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[1]American Association of School Administrators, *School District Reorganization* (Washington, D.C.: the Association, 1959), p. 23.

[2]James B. Conant, *The American High School Today* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1959), pp. 14, 17.

[3]Howard A. Dawson, *Satisfactory Local School Units* (Nashville, Tenn: George Peabody College for Teachers, 1934).

[4]Harlan D. Beem, "School District Organization: Status and Basic Factors and School District Organization in Illinois" (Chicago: Midwest Administration Center, University of Chicago, 1948). (Unpublished.)

[5]AASA., *op cit.*, p. 113.

[6]"Golden Anniversary White House Conference on Children and Youth, Recommendations, Composite Report of Forum Findings" (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1959), p. 26.

[7]Ray W. Johnson, "School District Organization in Riverside County--A Master Plan" (Riverside, Calif.: Unpublished report, Riverside County Committee on School District Organization, July, 1959).

[8]NEA, Educational Policies Commission, "An Essay on Quality in Public Education" (Washington, D.C.: the Association, 1959), p. 13.